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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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JORDAN: Does Hussein Believe in a West Bank Option?

Summary

We believe King Hussein will urge West Bank leaders to join Jordan in peace negotiations with Israel if PLO Chairman Arafat backs out. Amman's increased attention to West Bank concerns since the King's appointment of Zaid Rifai as Prime Minister three months ago suggests a calculated effort to create an atmosphere of goodwill. Hussein has charged Rifai with the task of redressing a large number of West Bank grievances. One of Rifai's main objectives in the process apparently is to cultivate relations with a group of young West Bank leaders willing to cooperate with the King on negotiations if Arafat balks.

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In our view, Jordan's recent activism on West Bank matters is designed to do more than maintain pressure on Arafat to be forthcoming in his dialogue with Hussein. The King has long considered the possibility of West Bank Palestinians joining with Jordan in peace negotiations with Israel if Arafat refuses to cooperate. Hussein is acutely aware of the overwhelming West Bank popular support for Arafat and the strong disinclination among West Bank leaders to challenge the PLO's authority as the "sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." The King nevertheless seems to believe that West Bankers will eventually change their position if Arafat continues to vacillate.

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Israel-Jordan-Palestinian Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 15 July 1985 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments are welcome and should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [redacted]

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Hussein probably believes his best chance for weaning Palestinian support away from Arafat is to demonstrate greater effectiveness than the PLO in responding to West Bank concerns. Senior Jordanian officials, including Crown Prince Hassan and Palace Adviser Abu Odeh, have told US Embassy officials that Jordan's haphazard approach to dealing with West Bank issues in recent years has damaged Jordan's credibility and that the government must devise and implement a more ambitious economic development plan to generate increased West Bank support.

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Obeidat's Legacy of Confusion and Neglect

To this end, we believe the King instructed Prime Minister Rifai to make East Bank-West Bank relations one of his top priorities. Rifai underscored the importance of this objective in his policy statement shortly after taking office, in which he stressed his intent to pursue an expanded agenda for development in the area.

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Relations between Jordan and West Bank leaders stagnated under the previous administration headed by Prime Minister Obeidat. Palestinians accused Obeidat of a "secret police" attitude toward the West Bank because of his imposition of strict limitations on their movement into the East Bank.

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The Obeidat administration further alienated West Bankers by failing to coordinate policy on economic development projects and other issues such as the appointment of Arab mayors in the territories. Because Obeidat and his cabinet differed on these matters and did not see them as priority issues, the government was unable to work out clear policy guidelines, leaving West Bank leaders confused and frustrated.

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Financial concerns apparently have been an additional hindrance to improved Jordan-West Bank ties. Crown Prince Hassan told US Embassy officials recently that a major reason for Jordan's hesitancy to move more quickly on establishing a bank on the West Bank was the lack of sufficient funds for capital formation and reserves. In his view, such a bank could hurt Jordan's own troubled financial picture if remittances from West Bankers working in the Gulf were to go directly to the West Bank rather than to financial institutions in Amman. In an effort to help Jordan strengthen ties with the West Bank, Hassan has asked

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the United States to funnel increased aid funds for the West Bank through Jordan. [REDACTED]

Rifai's Renewed Activism

Since assuming office, Prime Minister Rifai has made several changes which seem designed to demonstrate a new attitude of concern and support for the West Bank. Rifai's choice of cabinet members graphically illustrates this new trend. The present cabinet is evenly divided between Jordanians and Palestinians, thereby giving Palestinians the largest number of positions since the 1970-71 civil war. Over half of the 11 Palestinian ministers have solid family ties to the West Bank and the rest have at least some connection with West Bank communities. [REDACTED]

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Rifai subsequently named a new Jordanian contingent to the Joint Jordan-PLO committee which is responsible for channeling Arab funds to the West Bank in an effort to improve its efficiency. More recently he lifted a number of the restrictions imposed by the previous administration to allow:

- Young West Bank men between the ages of 16 and 28 (those eligible for military service) to come to Jordan for a visit or to look for work. They also can go abroad for unlimited periods if they have a work contract.
- More places for West Bankers in Jordanian universities.
- Secondary School graduates to stay in Amman for a year instead of only one month.
- Law graduates to work in Jordan for two years to gain practical experience.
- A limited number of West Bank teachers to work in Jordanian schools.
- More West Bank produce to enter the country, despite the government's desire to protect East Bank farmers. [REDACTED]

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We believe that King Hussein and Rifai intended many of these changes to affect primarily the younger generation of West Bank Palestinians, in hope of encouraging them to look to Amman--rather than the PLO--to enhance their quality of life.

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[REDACTED] Hussein probably calculates that the old guard West Bank leadership has been discredited by years of inaction and will never be able to bring the West Bank along. On the other hand, young West Bankers, who have always lived under the occupation, may be persuaded to work with Jordan on local issues and eventually be drawn into cooperation on negotiations with Israel. [REDACTED]

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Hussein's interest in the younger generation can be seen in his own government. Both Foreign Minister Masri and Minister of Occupied Territories Kanaan are young men of Palestinian descent who display a determination to push the peace process forward.

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Outlook

We believe Hussein's well-known view that 1985 is a particularly auspicious year to move toward actual negotiations will dissuade him from automatically washing his hands of the whole business if Arafat fails him again. Hussein has not given up that easily in the past, and we believe he will again at least make the overture to West Bank leaders in an attempt to keep some momentum alive. His 10 April 1983 speech ending his dialogue with Arafat, in our view, was designed to put the onus on the PLO and encourage West Bankers to work with Jordan rather than lose the opportunity altogether.

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The chances for Hussein winning West Bank support without PLO approval, however, are still doubtful. US Consul in Jerusalem reports on West Bank attitudes toward Jordan say they have mellowed since Rifai took office. Bethlehem Mayor Freij's recent comments following his return from Amman also suggest that he expects some breakthroughs soon on the Arab mayor or bank issues. But the most serious factors likely to discourage West Bank leaders are out of Hussein's control, including the threat of assassination by Syrian or Palestinian radicals. The deeply entrenched popular support for Arafat, moreover, is unlikely to wither away quickly and may well outlive another collapse of the Jordan-PLO dialogue.

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